761 776 842 After the marital couple has absorbed the fruit, a smooth-bodied embryo with nonarticulated limbs is formed in the maternal womb. /58/ It is at this moment that the couple consummate the sexual act in the course of which the woman "takes into herself the entire body of her husband": the upper part through the eyes, the lower part through the genital organs. The masculine seed located in the seven principal articulations (knees, elbows, ankles, and spine) transmits them to the embryo. The body, originally similar to the body of the spirit, thus becomes that of a human being.

The spirit restows the spiritual forces after the man has mated for the second time with his wife. If the woman bears a single child it means that the man, in the course of the second union, formed the double of the first germ, but was not permitted to procreate twins.

761 776 843 774 Faro disposes of the child's life and nature. He decides all that the child will be and will do, and determines his destiny from the moment the seed is placed by him in the womb. The foetus then develops with no further modifications until parturition, at which time it receives the spiritual principles, the soul, ni, and the double, dya, which will be his throughout his life. It is at this time that the inner relations of the individual to the social group to which he belongs intervene. Although Faro gives each child a new body, he animates this body with spiritual forces drawn from the family reservoir. The [775] newborn child is the direct heir to the ni and the dya of a deceased member of the family, actually of the one, whatever one's sex, who died shortly before the birth of the child (1).

1. The reincarnation of the deceased's spiritual principles, however, is not an absolute rule. Faro is the master of an infinite reserve of souls. Twins, albinos, and certain other children are born with the ni and dya as yet undetermined. They originate respectively in the second sky (kaba dye) and in water (dyi sumale). Further study on this particular point is necessary to complete this investigation.

761 776 774 775 The consequence of death was, in effect, to separate the corpse from the forces that animated it. The ni, by appropriate ritual, had been preserved on the altar of the ancestors (2), and the dya had left

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775

2. Grouped hierarchally, children, male adults, and women form religious societies or institutions, dyo. Each dyo is charged with the upkeep of altars which serve to preserve the spiritual forces of the group. (See p.

the dying man to go into the water and place itself under Faro's protection. At the moment of delivery, both ni and dya return to the body of the newborn child who replaces the dead man, but they return in reversed order: the dya is returned to the body of the child and becomes his ni; the ni of the deceased mixes with the birth water spread on the ground which forms the shadow (suma) and will be his double, the twin (1). In the case of a boy, the dya will be female; in the

[844
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1. The blood of childbirth represents the excess tomato juice absorbed by the woman, that which remains in the womb after the formation of the embryo. On the eighth day after birth, the mother of the parturient woman squeezes three or four tomatoes (depending on the sex of the newborn) into a gourd which she then gives to the child's father. The latter makes his wife drink the juice to replace the blood which she has lost and which is considered impure.

case /59/ of a girl, it will be male. These movements are independent of the sex of the deceased as the spirit reverses the sexes when necessary. Each human being is thus both male and female [828] through his soul and his double. This conception of human nature, which is fundamental to the Bambara, is expressed in the symbolism [801] of numbers. The number seven is formed of three (male sexual symbol) and four (female sexual symbol) and represents the complete man. In addition, on another level, the number six is that of male twins, seven that of mixed twins (and the hermaphrodite), and eight that of female twins. The body of the newborn child is gently tapped [844] by the number of strokes representing the above figures in order to call the child's ni according to its sex.

D. Role of the Institution

794 182 According to Bambara expression, the ndomo is "the mother of the wanzo of the uncircumcised (1)" for its power which resides in the

1. Wanzo ba ye ceble

ritual objects /175/ is composed of the wanzo of all adolescents.

The mask and the altars at first keep a part of the wanzo of the members who wear them, manipulate them, or offer them sacrifices. On the other hand, after circumcision, at the moment of the final leap of the newly circumcised over the ritual fire, the wanzo ultimately leaves them to settle itself in the mask of the ndomo. Thus channeled and conserved, these forces add themselves to those of the uncircumcised in the masks which become the repositories of their life.

[175] Moreover, the soul of the uncircumcised and nonexcised who have died prematurely establishes itself in the altars during the funeral rites celebrated by the members.

The mask of the ndomo is thus the receptacle of the wanzo of the circumcised, living and dead; as for the altars, they contain all the souls of the uncircumcised dead. All of this confers upon the ndomo the responsibility for the life of the adolescents and gives it such power that to a certain extent, this society of young people is feared by the adults (2) who have left it.

794 833 782 2. When an adult, especially a member of the Komo society, has disturbed the peace of a member of the ndomo or has wronged the society, the wanzo may cause him to be impotent. In this case, in order to recover his virility, the man must obtain several tens of gray lizards which are sacrificed in his name on the mask and other altars. The animals are then cooked and the man is completely smeared over with the cooked substance which is then placed in the calabash and poured over the altars; the wanzo assigned to the man by the ndomo thus returns to the latter and the man is rid of its evil.

304 During the seclusion, they wear about their head a piece of white
[292 cloth, Faro's color, which has the same function as the cap of the
534] circumcised boy. They shake a gourd bolokode barani, filled with eight grains or small pebbles, whose sound keeps passers-by away. The leaps, which they perform over the fire made of clothes, gourds, and refuse that have been ignited, end the seclusion and rid them of their wanzo, which goes to settle in the altars of the ndomo.

It is said of a young girl who was well excised that she is well behaved and carries herself with dignity. On the contrary, it is said of a girl of light morals "that her hands were not washed clean" (1),

1. A bolo ma ko ka dye ya.

which means that she was improperly excised.

Funerals

761 The effect of death is to dissociate the elements composing the
764 person. The body becomes a corpse (su) from which the /189/ ni and
775 the dya escape to follow their particular destinies, while the tere is transformed into nyama, an active and dangerous force which wanders about the deceased. The funeral rites aim first to channel the deceased's spiritual elements which must be conserved in the interest of the deceased as well as that of the community. Moreover, through the care given to the body and to these elements, the memory of the dead person is piously kept up. The notion of a final resurrection, promised to all who have lived, inspires these preparations. The bones of the deceased, which are like the exuvia of his physical body, its solid and durable framework, join the exuvia of his soul which is kept in the altars of the Komo. Thus, at the end of time, the dead man "will rise and, to everyone's joy, join his family."

764 The funeral rites, which the Bambara have always celebrated, have evolved along with their beliefs. At the time when the cult of the balanza was flourishing, the dead bodies were hung from trees until they rotted, their bones picked up and kept by their descendants.
[532] The ancestors of the Gwonna then carved pieces of sunzun wood called mani (literally, little person) in the image of the dead. The length of the wood was proportionate to the length of the body; the head, arms, legs, and genitals were carefully reproduced. The mani

764 were kept by the village patriarch and the cult of the ancestors was celebrated upon these altars.

At the present time, the body is buried during rites in which the Komo plays an important role for the initiates. As soon as a member 763 is seriously ill, the family head places upon the dying man's chest 778 the portable altar, kere la boli ni, which belongs to the community. He does not leave the bedside in order to catch the last breath. Immediately after death, without turning back or saying a word to anyone, he goes to the chief of the Komo who places the object in the [775] sanctuary where the altars are kept. The soul is introduced into the nimara boli (1).

[843]

1. See p. 192. In former times, the soul of the dead man was caught between two gourds which were then joined together and hung on the conjugal bed. When the woman became pregnant, the gourds were broken over her abdomen in order to make the soul penetrate the foetus. Later on this method of transmission of the soul was no longer possible because of the impurity brought about by "frivolous discussions regarding the arrangements and situations of creation."

764 Upon his return to the house of the deceased, the family head brushes his hand over the dead man's face to gather his nyama which he then entrusts to Pemba by rubbing the cavity in the family pembele "so that the total of the work he has accomplished during his life will not be dissolved by death, but will be like /190/ an accumulated force serving the community, and so that his intelligence, his qualities, and his skill in different kinds of work, especially in agriculture, will not be lost but will be found in other members of the family. The [778] block of wood, acting as an altar for storing the forces, preserves this nyama until a new birth occurs in the family" (2).

2. S. De Ganay, "Aspects de mythologie et de symbolique bambara," p. 199.

69 2. M fa faro n so ma bana a dyanza ye kle saba kono ye; ni ye se i ka seki, muso kono ma.

The offering of food is then renewed every three days until a birth brings about the return of the double into the world of the living.

If the dead man has no descendants, his altar remains forever in the sanctuary of the Komo near the nimara boli. Otherwise, it is returned within seven days to the eldest son or to the brother who then becomes the head of the family.

769 During the night following the seventh day, the soul returns to eat
775 and drink in the hut of the widow who lives alone. All the dishes containing water or food are therefore carefully emptied and cleaned. The same meal is offered to the deceased the night following the fortieth day after the death. The widow comes out of her house on the [765] eighth day if she is poor and must work for a living; otherwise, on the forty-first day.

At the end of a variable period of time, the soul, the double, and the name of the deceased are received by a child who is born into the family. The exuvia, mana or folo of the soul, remains in the sanctuary of the Komo as a permanent testimony to his existence on earth. It is conserved by Faro who watches over it, and maintained by the offerings of the living who will in this way bring it to the final resurrection.

When the deceased does not belong to the Komo society, the rites are celebrated over the altars of the societies to which he belongs; his soul is likewise conserved by them. The spiritual principles /195/ of the women, grouped in institutions comparable to those of men, called muso dye, are the object of the same attentions in which is found the rhythm of four days, the female number.

766 If the deceased was too poor for all the rituals, which are always costly, to be observed, two gourds of water are prepared and placed one at the head, the other at the feet of the corpse; he is then lifted in such a way that his image is reflected in the water. This accomplished, eight cowrie shells are placed at his head and eight at his feet and the gourds are covered with a winnowing tray; the image thus conserved is supposedly reflected in the kaba mana, the fourth sky, where Faro, 776 symbolized by the cowrie shells, passes judgment on its state of purity.
787 A divining rite is then performed. If the man is pure, the villagers

776 787 attend his burial despite the fact that the rituals have not been performed. If not, he is abandoned to the care of his family.

764 775 To neglect the rituals assuring life in the beyond and the security of the living causes the shadow su dya, or the ghost su kere dye (literally, white side of the dead man), to arise and present itself under the same which the dead man had on earth, to claim his due from his descendants.

Ancestor Cult

769 778 In the entryway of some residences a supporting stake (cɛ̌ dloma), sometimes marked by seven notches, represents the founding ancestor of the family. On the anniversary of his death the stake is oiled "to refresh his soul." In addition, each year the owner of the house sacrifices to all the ancestors on the family altar, on the stake, and on the threshold of the door. In some villages the ancestors are called upon by tapping the threshold with a little wooden hammer, dyele kala ni, which represents them.

In the courtyards, pieces of wood stuck in the ground (jigi semen dloma) represent the paternal uncle, the brother of the founder, and are used as seats for the heads of families who lean against them "in order to lean well upon the traditions." Farmers, before leaving for the fields, rub their hoes on them to show them to the ancestors.

769 241 Before planting the women give the head of the family a ball of raw millet, which he lines up to represent the dead according to age and rank. Then he gives them a pinch of the seed beginning with the one representing the most recent deceased and calling successively all the dead by name. The paste and the seeds are then put in water and the mash thus obtained is poured on the /196/ doorposts to the entryway of the family house upon which the blood of a sacrificial victim also is poured. When the planting time comes, the chief who has prepared the mash made with a few grains taken from the seeds distributes this to the women, beginning with the one who represents the oldest deceased. He asks the ancestors to watch over, during the germination period, the soul of the millet which will descend into the seed with the first rainfall. When the millet has reached maturity, the first seeds harvested are placed in a pot on the threshing floor where the grain will be threshed later, and are distributed to the women in the same manner as the time of planting, the oldest of the deceased having to receive the first of the seed.

774 it is a fluid emanated from the body itself and made manifest as much by the shadow, which may be seen in sunlight or in a bright light, as by the image which appears when the body is placed in front of a reflecting surface. This fluid is called dya.

774 787 The dya has the faculty of leaving the body when it is asleep to wander wherever it wishes; the sight of its wanderings, which the body can witness, constitutes a dream (sugo). Dream is a kind of reality; it is in a sense the private life of the dya in company with its fellow-dya. During waking hours, the dya accompanies the actions of the body; during sleep, the body must endure the dya's peregrinations, for there is no doubt but that the dya rules the body it inhabits. Thus, waking a person abruptly is virtually a criminal act because, if the dya is away [761] at the time, a too abrupt summons may break the link between the dya and the body, and such a rupture (sa) is death (sa). Besides, the body has only a vague memory of the wanderings of its dya, it experiences the consequences of this action. On awaking, the body is exhausted by all these mad rushing about and fantastic escapades, and it feels the effects of the dya's actions, either good or bad.

In short, this dya is comparable to what some Europeans call a "double."

775 Further, it appears that the dya plays a crucial role in the "return" (sagi) to life, that is, rebirth, which is one of the most strongly held beliefs of the Bambara. After death, the dya is reincarnated in the same families; the Bambara even claim to have positive proof of this fact. Such and such a newborn child has such and such anatomical peculiarity of the deceased -- is this not a proof that the deceased wanted to show thereby that he was re-embodied? If a child dies very young, the body is mutilated in some agreed manner -- a finger is broken, for instance -- [121] and if later a child is born in the family with a similar deformity, everyone is convinced that the dead child has "returned": a sagira, "he has returned."

It is also believed possible for a dead person to be reincarnated far from his own people. All over Bambara country stories are retold of dead people who, more or less long after

775 their death and more or less far away from the place where they died, have been seen living a new life.

774 The dya is then, as it were, the essence of individuality, and the body, its material expression, takes on forms that are 775 somehow characteristic of the dya.

The dya is a fluid which has its own attributes. There are sorcerers who are thought to know ways to capture the dya, especially for the purpose of using it to make idols that can talk.

It is further believed that a part of the dya is indestructible because it is made up of another fluid common to all nature, which the Bambara call nyama.

The nyama has no shape, but it retains, as it were, a trace of the identity it had during its incarnation; so the name borne by the person who was animated by this nyama has an irresistible attraction for the nyama and the latter is forced to obey anyone who knows how to use this propensity to make it carry out his wishes. After death, the nyama retains human contacts and, in certain respects, continues to behave as it did during its corporeal lifetime. Its manifestations are seen by the Bambara in matters of vengeance: the nyama of an ancestor is especially attentive to the manner in which the ancestor's wishes are being carried out and it is relentless in punishing those who fail to comply. It is the nyama of the fa (father of a family or patriarch) who torments the accursed; it is the nyama of the victim who pursues the murderer; and it is the nyama of anything tabooed that strikes down the impious.

So it is that, for the Bambara, a human being is composed of a corporeal body (su) which serves as the outward envelope (fure) of a fluid element (dya), whose subtle essence (nyama) is merely a part of the universal energy which permeates all nature.

771 [122] To a certain extent the Bambara applies the foregoing ideas on human beings to all that surrounds him. However, it should not be assumed from this that he conceives of everything as being made exactly in his own image. To express abstract ideas, he uses concrete terms which may, however, give a false impression. There is no doubt whatever that the Bambara differentiates between himself and animals; he also distinguishes from vegetables or minerals.

562 This suspicion readily degenerates into disrespect, scorn and
778 hatred when a woman [123] is weak -- this being the usual state of affairs. On the contrary, the feeling changes to superstitious fear if she resorts to occult practices and shows herself
[754] an adept at sorcery. Many old women are held to be very expert at such practices.

851 In the same connection, it should be noted that a newborn child is also subject to scrutiny. For seven days after birth it is not officially taken into the family, because it is thought that during this period the infant may undergo metamorphosis unless closely watched over by its mother.

We shall see, through a study of their institutions, how the Bambara conceive of life and organize it.

Funeral practices will show us how the Bambara regard the idea of death.

And after death?

● 775 The Romans distinguished among spirits: the manes or
769 good gods (dü[1] manes) and the lemurs or evil spirits, both of whom take an interest in the family.

The Bambara have analogous concepts.

Once it has left the body, the soul of a patriarch goes to join the souls of his ancestors, where it finds a spiritual family which protects the earthly family.

The manes (fa su-u) always like to frequent the places where their bodies lived, and that is why one keeps the things that belong to the deceased, why he is buried near his house or sometimes even under the floor, and why some families piously keep the skull of the departed to do it honor.

[778] The entrance-hut (blon') is usually the site of the altar of the ancestors and of the family gods. The ancestral altar may be a small board with a human mask, called kara, or a mound of earth shaped vaguely like a human being. The manes are thought to enter into these objects to receive the offerings and sacrifices made to them.

It is sometimes thought that the world of the manes may be without light and heat but that otherwise they each continue the existence it had in life with the same passions, the same

1 [dei ? —Analyst]

775 passions, the same preferences and the same [124] animosities.
769 The weak lead a passive existence in poverty and oblivion, whereas the powerful -- chiefs, heads of families, diviners -- are, on the contrary, active, intriguing and passionately devoted to the interests of their earthly families. They live among their fellow beings, who are incorporeal like themselves, just as their relatives live on earth. However, they all have powers superior to those of earthly men over winds and rain, farming and hunting, in short, over all things that constitute the visible world of man. All can manifest themselves to the living, and they like to choose a place where their presence and their action will be most useful and where they prefer to receive offerings, as in a grove, on a hill, or near a spring or a tomb.

Certain manes are thought to attain an increasingly eminent position in the invisible world through special activity, until they become pure spirits.

Woe unto him who fails to maintain cordial relations with his manes! Woe unto him who neglects the dead! The dead suffer from such negligence, become angry and seek vengeance. Hence the terrifying appearance of ghosts who come to bewitch the impious; hence the possession that disturbs a person's faculties to such a degree that it makes him dangerous to others and only exorcisers could restore them to their normal state.

Here occur the analogies with the lemures, for abandoned manes are easily captured through the sorcerers' artifices and then must do the latter's bidding. Further, all those who were cast off by society during their lifetime because of harmful activities, like those of sorcerers or criminals, the accursed also have their thurifers, whom they help with their supernatural powers.

775 Does this survival of the good and the evil have any purpose or any duration and, if so, what are they? Do people believe in immortality or eternity? Obviously the Bambara do not ask such questions and native practices do not seem to provide any answers. The one definite belief is in a survival which the Bambara can only conceive of in terms of ordinary life; the terms used to describe the other world bear this out: the dead eat,

●776 drink, dress themselves, wear adornments, etc. -- in short, behave exactly like living men.

812 [125] All peoples use or have used such language in trying to express a concept which is by its nature impossible to make concrete. It is, therefore, perhaps premature to conclude that a Bambara cannot conceive of a strictly immaterial world for his manes. He is merely at present incapable of giving a description unencumbered with concrete terms in habitual use. However, it may be stated in general that the Bambara does not trouble himself about the why or how of things outside of what he sees or knows. Reality surrounds him and limits him. He makes decisions on the spur of the moment and also under the influence of time-honored empiricism which is the basis of custom.

776 We have pointed out that among the incorporeal souls are some who, through the right efforts, rise to such heights that they can enter the world of spirits. There are spirits, indeed, who have nothing of the human about them. What are their origin and nature? The Bambara say of them: ma si fa do, meaning "It is a kind of person." Here, too, the expression betrays the thought. Aside from the fact that the native vocabulary does not provide for expressions strictly immaterial, the Bambara has an inevitable tendency to use himself as an object of comparison. For him, the world of the spirits like that of the manes, is analogous to our own. But the manner in which he speaks of the spirits contradicts his words. A spirit is invisible, without a material body; if it appears, it does so under the most diverse forms, borrowed for a brief time. A spirit is often called "a wind," meaning "a fluid." It is also a weightless substance, so rarefied that it can go anywhere -- even to entering a living man's body, where it can perform all sorts of fantastic things (1).

1. See Chapter 7.

For the Bambara, most spirits remain in this vague and inconsistent state. Only events, circumstances or the native's will occasionally tear some of them away from this chaos and transports them to the worldly scene (2). We shall speak of them

2. Assuming for these and other similar

771 used to capture the spirits of the dead. The native clearly shows
789 how much he respects the cult of the manes and, on the contrary, how much he is disturbed and terrified by the practices of the suba (1). However, many practices cannot be so clearly

1. See Chapter 7 concerning the suba.

differentiated because they have elements of both religion and magic. Such practices are held to be allowable and even desirable, illicit and hateful, depending on the point of view and the places, circumstances and persons involved.

If we keep in mind the foregoing remarks and limit ourselves to the most characteristic traits, it is possible to establish a parallel between religion and magic among the Blacks.

Both acknowledge the existence of an invisible world which is everywhere in contact with everything subject to our senses. But while religion in principle assumes man's dependence vis-à-vis this invisible world, magic operates on the theory that anything that exists comes within the power of "the one who knows" (don'na ba).

Since the Master of the Universe appears not to take much interest in what he has created, his creatures do not honor him but, rather, have recourse to the Spirits and Powers (nyana) who are willing to take a hand in human affairs. Religion organizes, for the benefit of these benevolent nyana, a cult designed to make sure of their good offices. Magic, on the other hand, forces them to execute its will.

• 775 Religion and magic both believe firmly in the dual nature of man: a finite body and a soul which survives this body. When death comes, this soul goes off to join the family of manes, who are bodiless souls like it. From that vantage point the soul continues to watch over the affairs of its relatives still in the world of men. Religion regards the manes as guardian spirits and strives to make sure the continuity of their [140] will and wishes. Magic treats (1) these incorporeal souls like the

1. Especially by means which give magic the character of sorcery.

596 honored by the new fa, and there is nothing to prevent him
614 from adding to the treasure.

769 The basic cult of the family is the cult of the ancestors. Although the dead are frequently buried outside the family residence, their souls are thought to live in the blon' of the dwelling. The blon' is a hut with two openings on opposite sides, one [343 592] to the street and the other to the interior, usually the courtyard. It is impossible to enter or leave a house without going through the blon', where there is always a guard, at least in important houses. The ancestors are usually represented in the 778 blon' by a group of crude, conical clay figures of a man and 769 woman, the latter identifiable by the exaggerated breasts. Sometimes the symbol of the dead is a small board about a meter long, twenty centimeters wide, and a little more than a centimeter thick; at one of its extremities a slight protuberance vaguely suggests a head, a kind of ellipsoidal cylinder with eyes, nose, mouth, and chin faintly carved on one side. On the side with the face, the board has a checkerboard pattern, often of alternating black and red squares, probably to indicate the material of a loincloth. The lower extremity of the figure has a semicircular portion cut away to give the effect of legs spread apart when the effigy is set up.

769 Whatever form it may have, the representation of the dead is called kara (1) and serves in some manner as an altar
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1. In Soninké, kara means "to die" and "death."

on which libations are poured and to which are attached the remains of the sacrifices made to the dead (su-u). Nevertheless, it is also a very widespread practice to make libations and sacrifices before the door of the blon' and, more rarely, before the door of an inner hut. In this case the liquid is poured and [775] the remains smeared on the vertical edge of the opening. This practice is based on the belief that the souls of the dead ancestors like to return to the place where the fa liked to sit during his lifetime. Undoubtedly, the ancestors are regarded as guardians of the threshold; they are [181] honored as such because it is believed that they prefer to be honored in this way.

[826] 774 761 its seat in the prepuce and the clitoris, necessitating circumcision and excision). The body is conceived as being the support of all spiritual forces; each part is distinctly known [84] for its particular role. The body, like the spiritual principles, is bisexual; the boy [304] is feminine in his prepuce, the girl masculine in her clitoris, and it 831] is only after circumcision and excision that the man and woman can unite and realize the original fruitful twinship. On the metaphysical plane, there is identity between man, "seed of the world," and the cereal seed; the basic nutriments that are made up of the eight principal cereals are represented symbolically in men's clavicles. Finally, death separates all of these elements composing the person. 775 The dya remains in the water where it will become the ni of the 761 new-born in the family of the deceased; the ni is caught by the family head and transported to the altar where it will animate the dya of the new-born; the téré becomes nyama, a dangerous and vengeful force; it is deposited on the pembele, where it rejoins the ancestral forces. The body is buried and belongs to the termites. At birth, all the spiritual forces are transmitted again, whole, "refreshed," and purified. One being replaces another until the final resurrection.

C. Ritual, Sacrifice, and Cults

782 To appeal to and influence the spiritual forces, the Bambara use prayer, offerings, and sacrifices. Oral rites are used everywhere and at any time. "They pray to the sky, the cardinal points, the spirits; they sacrifice on stones, on the ground, on trees, by water holes, just as on altars sheltered in the sanctuaries or situated in public or private places. Every circumcized adult, father of a family, owner of a home and cultivatable land, is a sacrificer, a capacity [53] emphasized by the red spot which sometimes is an ornament of the walls of the principal room in the man's residence." (1)

1. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

761 principles of the cadaver on altars or masks in order to preserve them
764 for the community.

The rites have undergone an evolution. Formerly the bodies
764 were hung from trees until they rotted, while the bones were kept. At present the bodies are buried. Only a band of cotton symbolizing the tongue of the deceased, that is, his word, is attached to the branch of a tree. If the deceased was an initiate of the Komo, the
[764] society plays an important role in the funeral rites.

All these rites have been studied by G. Dieterlen and Tauxier.
766 Monteil has described at great length the funeral ceremonies of a chief: the three rifle shots recalling his combats, the lamentations of the women, the notification of the village notables, the offerings of relatives and friends, the alms at the crossroads, and finally, the inhumation. The body is prepared, the head shaved, the interior cleaned with water and salt. A paste of water and ground cowry is put into the body openings (the ground cowries possess a divine spirit assuring the preservation of the cadaver). The body, and particularly the head, is daubed with this same paste, then the body is laid on its right side, feet to the north (a woman would be laid on her left side). Finally, the funeral celebration takes place, with the ritual feast
765 and the purifications. Seven days later the celebration of commemoration (Sangha) takes place, followed by the mourning of the women for forty days. After this time the deceased is transformed into a living ancestor.

763 The Bambara receive omens of their death or of a chief's death from certain signs given them in the bush, such as coming across a chameleon on a red anthill, the cry of a certain mythical hyena, the passing of certain crying monkeys or certain birds.

Certain gifted beings have the ability to perceive the departure of a person's spiritual forces and his imminent death. Sometimes they are able to bring back these forces and reinstate them in the body to save the man in danger.

[95] g. Ancestor Worship

769 After his death a man is transformed into a living ancestor
● 775 and is the object of a cult. The cult is closely connected to the agricultural cults; the ancestors are efficient vital forces which

769 participate in men's lives, protect them, and make their fields
775 fertile. The farming tools are presented at their altars before the tillage, and every year their souls come to animate the maskers who dance in their honor under the supervision of the Komo. After the grain is threshed, they receive the first products and are offered sacrifices.

h. Other Rites

788 Besides the rites concerning the person, the Bambara have others, such as those relating to the household wastes where the forces of men are accumulated. The purpose of these rites is to offer these forces to Faro and to regenerate and purify men. The wastes are burned periodically, the men breathe in the fumes, and the ashes are thrown in the river. Sacrifices are offered to the god, and special dances accompany the ceremony.

796 Rain rites common to all of Africa are practiced in May by the members of the Kworé society. The rites for renewing the year involve individual, familial, and collective participation. The signs of the world are traced on the walls of individual or collective sanctuaries, and by the intermediary of a sacrifice on the altars, by dances and rhythmic chants, man renews the cardinal points and the forces of the world which in turn renew his soul. (All these rites have been described by G. Dieterlen in the Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

B. Special Technique In General Usage

773 In Bambara thought, "every technique is a reparation taught man by Faro, a palliative to the cosmic disorder which is generally caused by an infraction of taboo ... Men first lived by gathering their food, then later by fishing and hunting; they used only their hands. Little by little the techniques appeared, following a chronology remembered by the Bambara of today. The first material to be used was the fiber of the nyama tree frond which were made the first fishing nets, the first sling, the first covering for the sexual parts." (1) The second material was wood from which the farming

1. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

3. The Reincarnation of Souls

775 769 It is a great surprise that the Bambara believe in the reincarnation of souls. Some do not dare to believe in it because they sacrifice to the shades of their ancestors, and others, "cultivated minds, nourished by the sanest philosophy," reject this belief as illogical, since the religion of the Negro is the worship of the dead! They do, in fact, worship the dead, but in the Bambara religion this worship, extensive as it is, remains a detail, and not the foundation. To honor the shades of his ancestors (but only of those who were heads of families, so that the worship of the dead is already somewhat limited -- with all due respect to those who see nothing but it), the Bambara family head throws a big blot of chicken blood and a mouthful of chewed kola nut onto the dégé, or millet flour mixed with water, and pours it onto the wall at the entrance of his hut. He does so to implore the help and protection of that power or authority which his predecessors possessed in their position as family head, an authority exactly the same as that which he himself possesses. He believes, nonetheless, in the reincarnation of souls! This belief is general and universal among fetishists, and if some do not dare admit it before Europeans and [576] Moslems, their reticence is due to simple human respect, to a fear of contradicting beliefs which they know to be contrary to their own, a wish not to offend anyone and not to be the butt of laughter and ridicule.

766 775 Infants who die at the breast before having achieved the use of reason are buried in a corner of the inner courtyard and sometimes even in the hut where they were born. Before such a child is buried, one of its limbs, usually the big toe of the right foot, is broken, and sometimes the father marks it with a knife on /57/ the shoulder, the arm, or the chest. He thinks that the child who will come after it will be animated by the soul of the dead one, and he neglects nothing that might possibly enable him to ascertain whether it is. This stupid and ridiculous operation is commonly performed under the eyes of the mother, and some strange events occur. Since she must submit 775 to the will of her husband as soon as possible and have marital relations 826 with him, she soon conceives. During her pregnancy her imagination

775 826 may be active and in her dreams she may dwell on the events which accompanied the burial of her dead child. Thus, she sometimes gives birth to an infant which has the marks made by the father. Such occurences contribute not a little to "confirm" the Bambara's belief in reincarnation of souls. At Wéléngéla, on the road from Ségou to Sens, there was a Negro who had a cleft upper lip from birth, and the people of the village were unanimous in giving the reason. His mother had given birth only to sickly and puny infants, all of whom died within few weeks. At the death of the last one the father, furious, cut his lip with a stroke of the knife. When he returned to life, the child did not want to take back the lip that his father had removed! I have seen others who from birth had a sort of tattoo on the back, chest, or arms, and the parents of each did not hesitate to tell me that it was the mark made on his deceased older brother.

775 551 Children born after a deceased sister or brother are given a special name; it would seem that the Negroes seek to make the soul of this small being feel how inconsiderate he was toward his parents in coming into the world and immediately leaving, after having kindled both love and hope in their hearts. Perhaps they also think to put on a good countenance before their fellows, for it is a great disgrace not to have children or to have only children who die at birth. Both theories are plausible, and the second would only be an expression of humility disguising a secret hope. The names most frequently given to these latecomers are: Malobali, "shameless one"; Ta fli, "go throw it away"; Foui té, "he is nothing"; Fou, "nothing"; etc. -- If the first theory that I propose is accepted these names would be translated as follows: "Are you not ashamed (i.e., to come into the world only to leave it so soon)?" -- "Might just as well throw you away, bury you (i.e., for all the time /58/ you spend among us)." -- "You are no good /literally, in French: "a being of nothing"/ (you are but a heartless one, you who come to us only to leave us in a short time)." -- "That is nothing." A Negro blowing on the palm of his hand gives us the full meaning of this word; the gesture translates his thought: "You are no more to us than nothing, are you not like a breath that passes and disappears?"

775 551 Like this first theory, the second, too, can be accepted, and the names can be translated as a lament of the parents to those who congratulate them: "He is without shame (doubtless he has come back to leave us again)." --"We may as well throw him away (i.e., will he not leave us shortly?)." -- "He is a worthless man (i.e., do you think he will not abandon us?)." -- "He is nothing (i.e., it all is the same to us whether we have him or not; will he stay with us longer than a breath which passes and disappears?)."

But whatever theory is accepted, the Negroes' belief in the reincarnation of children who died at the breast before having attained the use of reason remains unchanged. They are also generally unanimous in believing in the reincarnation of young men and women and men and women who die in the prime of life. Such persons have not completed the whole cycle of their existence and must begin it again.

And what of the old men? Do not they come back to life? When a child brings to mind the features of a deceased elder of the family, does it not receive his name? A Bambara never uses the name of a man whom he respects in vain or in an unsuitable manner; so a child animated by the soul of an old man is given a second name, a borrowed name, and the real name is known only by the father, the mother, close friends, and the one who bears it. However, many are given a most expressive name which testifies to this belief; they are called segi, sagi, "he who has come back to life."

764 775 The legends -- and there are many -- only confirm what I put forward; so need I cite any? An old man of Fobougou, a village about 30 or 40 kilometers from Ségou, not far from the Bani on the road that leads to Koutiala, was given magnificent funeral honors at his death. The fetishes were brought out of their dirty dens and bathed in the blood of victims; the women sang to the sound of the drum for three days running. It was a festival which lacked nothing, not even 775 d'lo, or millet beer. A few years later some young people of the village going in search of work went into the Tlébi (1) region,

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1. The term Tlébi is used to denote the entire western region, including Bamako, Kati, Kita, Kayes, Bakel, etc., as far as the ocean.

775 walking in the direction of Kita. They stopped in a village near this city and were lodged by a Malinke (2). On entering the courtyard,

2. A Mandingo tribe whose group "taboo" is the Mali or Mani, the hippopotamus.

they stopped dumfounded, for they found sitting on a mat an elderly man whose features were familiar to them, -- wasn't he the old man of Fobougou? It was he, for he greeted them and asked them news of the old men of the village and of the members of his family. After supper they returned to the courtyard, wanting to sit near their old man, whom they had found again so far from his native land, but he was no longer there, and their host told them that he had fled, refusing to tell what direction he was taking.... "That was our old man," say the people of Fobougou with great conviction, for they believe in this as in the capture of Ségou. "Our young people saw him, talked with him, and some had known him before his death. Without doubt," they add, "he must have suffered in his family while he was alive, so he did not dare come back to life in our midst." This story, which I heard in Fobougou itself, is told more or less everywhere with a few variations; in September, 1908, between Ségou and Koulikoro on the Niger, one of the laptot (3) told it to his colleagues as they squatted

505 3. Negroes who serve as sailors on the river are called laptot.

around him in a circle.

775 551 576 In Ouentja, a village an hour and a half or two hours at the most from the Bani, on the road between Ségou and Koutiala, the people have such great respect for one of their deceased former chiefs, the old sagi, that they avoid saying his name. They have even changed or rather abbreviated one of their greetings, and while almost everywhere else strangers are greeted with the words: "i dangha sagi," here they say to you only: "i danghana (4)." According to the /60/

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4. I dangha sagi, "may you be blessed on your arrival, on your return into our midst." -- (Your return to us is a blessing.) -- The Negroes abbreviate, saying, i dana sagi; it is only old men and those who pride themselves on speaking their language well, who articulate clearly and say i dangha sagi.

legend, this sagi whose name one avoids taking in vain, was chief of the village and influential in its environs. He died very old, took on flesh again in the womb of a woman of the family, and recommenced the cycle of his existence. He again became village chief, and again died in extreme old age, and returned to the flesh again a third time. As always he was chief, passed from life to death in extreme old age, was honored and respected by everyone, and received funeral honors such as have never been awarded to any Negro prince.

775 At the time of death the soul goes into Lahara, a vague word, so vague that a Bambara cannot define it or give you any idea of it. It is the place where the invisible beings live and where everything becomes invisible. Children and those who have not completely fulfilled the cycle of their existence, only pass through and hasten to return to the wombs of their mothers, or at least to those of women of their families.

775 A secret force urges old men to return to the flesh again in
769 their own family, but sometimes they refuse and seek limbs elsewhere. They spend a longer time in Lahara and, doubtless matured by experience, they are not always in a hurry to reappear. Many remain there for a number of years, awaiting a favorable moment, and this uncertainty hovering over the fate of the old men, may be a reason for sacrifices to the dead. One definite fact is that these sacrifices are directed only to the dead who have had authority in the country, the village, or the family, and the honors rendered them seem to be

775 directed more to the authority which they had in their lifetimes than
769 to the persons themselves.

A good number of Bambara believe in hell and assert that the
775 souls of the wicked are condemned by God to eternal torment. It is clear that they are changed into demons and do not come back to life, but it is so difficult to deserve hell that not one Bambara goes there, and they live without any fear, just as if it did not exist. This belief in hell perhaps indicates an exception to my statement on the reincarnation of souls but does not destroy its validity, and it can be stated that the majority of Negroes believe in such a reincarnation. /61/

Chapter 4

Bambara Ideas concerning God, Invisible Beings, and Adam and Eve

1. Belief in God

776 The Bambara believe in the existence of a Supreme Being who is Creator and Master of all things; they believe in God, in a recompensing God who can punish and reward. Their most polished formulas are those in which they testify to their belief in Him, and His name is on their lips at every moment without any special reason.

To a young married couple, a Bambara hastens to say: "May
776 your union be happy, may God give you peace and many children,"
576 and when a family is in sorrow, for instance because they have lost one of the members, it is in God that they seek consolation and in invoking Him that they give comfort: "May God have pity on him and grant him a happy sojourn in Lahara," "may He not separate him from good people and may He add to your days those of which he has been deprived." (1)

776 1. These last phrases have been taken
775 by some as a reason to doubt that the

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Bambara believe in the reincarnation of souls. But the Negroes say that a soul separated from the body lacks something, it is not complete. Since a soul stays in Lahara for a fairly long time, until it finds the opportunity to be reincarnated and decides to do so, the wish is expressed that during this period that it may live with the souls of good people and not suffer too much from the loss of its body -- and nothing more. These comforting expressions are heard at every death, whether of a child, a man, or an old man.

776 842 The sterility of a woman is obviously not natural; it is attributed to fetishes, to the evil spells of a malicious person, and quite often /62/ also to God. "Alla b'a kégné dén-na --, God is placing an obstacle to /against/ her having children." As the Bambara gives small gifts of honey, cotton, butter, sugar, or cowrie shells to a woman who has just given birth, they say, "May God soothe your back (your pains); may He preserve your child." Upon receiving the slightest favor, the recipient commends the one who performed it to the protection of the Almighty, and the wishes at festivals and drinking bouts are an endless litany a large part of which refers to God.

776 The Bambara speak the name of God apropos of a trifle and always -- except in certain sacrifices to the boli fetishes where they use it blasphemously -- with some respect. I confess that (if I did not know through being somewhat acquainted with them that in their mouths this name is a word and no more, a commonplace into which enters neither affection nor love) it would sometimes seem that they have deep and tender feelings of piety. In fact there is nothing more touching than to hear a pagan Negro, a Bambara, answer whoever asks after his health: "Nébi Alla tanoun, I praise God, I glorify God."

766 young, and since custom demands that she take advantage of her marriage without delay and conceive as soon as possible, she may give birth to an infant bearing a mark or /217/ the appearance of a mark made on the corpse of its older brother. Such an event contributes more than a little toward strengthening the Bambara belief in the reincarnation of souls. This belief is even one of the reasons why infants at the breast are buried in the inner court and sometimes in the mother's hut, and are very seldom taken to the cemetery (1).

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1. The soul leaves the body after burial. The soul of a child must take on flesh again in the womb of its mother, and she must conceive as soon as possible. When an infant is buried in the court or the hut, its soul does not have to roam and cannot mistake the family.

764 The respects paid to the circumcised and the excised vary a little according to the age and status of the individuals; it might be said that there is no burial without some particular, characteristic little feature. To give as accurate an idea of the proceedings as possible, I have divided the burials into four categories: first, that of old people; second, that of heads of families; third, that of married persons; and fourth, that of the unmarried. After a word concerning the burial of pregnant women or those dying in childbirth, I will speak of the sacrifices made to the fetishes, of the respects paid to initiates of koré, or koté, and I will close this chapter with a description of the burial of the excommunicated and of the way the dead are worshipped.